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ABSTRACT

This instructor/lesson guide provides instructional materials for a 4-hour course in listening skills in the workplace. Stated objectives are to help students to become more effective listeners, to assist students in obtaining an understanding of how effective they are as listeners, and to assist students in identifying bad listening habits. Two introductory pages list references, terminal objectives, and general homework guidelines, and instructional materials (classroom requirements, transparencies, and handouts). The outline of instruction follows. The content is accompanied by corresponding instructor and student activities. Topics include what listening is, listening errors, personal listening profile, improving listening skills, and conclusion. The transparencies and handouts listed in the introductory pages follow. Contains 8 references. (YLB)

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ED 371 151

Instructor/Lesson Guide

Listening Skills

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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INSTRUCTOR/LESSON GUIDE

TOPIC: **Listening Skills**

TIME ALLOCATION: 4 hours

REFERENCES:

Adler, R. B.(1992). Communicating at work: principles and practices for business and the professions (4th ed.). San Francisco: McGraw-Hill.

Fitzpatrick, E. M., Ed.D. (1982). Study skills program, level III. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

Irwin, G.L., (1994). Builder, Teacher, Dreamer [Interview with Samuel R. Norton]. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Matzeck, M. (1991). Communication skills. In M. Matzeck (chair), Presentation Skills. Symposium held at the Alcoa, Tennessee Hyatt Regency under the guidelines of the Aluminum Company Of America Technical Training Program.

Marsh, D.T. (1980). Effective Listening Skills. Blagdon, England. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No: ED 351 594).

Pierce, C. G. (1982). Doing something about your listening ability. Supervisory Management, March. 29-34.

Steil, L. K., & Summerfield, J., & de Mare, G. (1988) Listening - It Can Change Your Life. New York: Ronald Press. pp. 203-207.

Sund, R. B. & Corin, A. (1978). Creative questioning and sensitive listening techniques, a self-concept approach. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing.

DATE: 22 March 1994

TERMINAL OBJECTIVES:

1. Assist students to become more effective listeners based on an awareness of their current listening ability.
2. Students will complete two assessments to obtain an understanding of how effective of listeners they are.
3. Student will identify bad listening habits that may prevent them from being or becoming good listeners.

HOMEWORK:

1. Review handout material.
2. Practice proper listening techniques with a friend.

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INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:

whiteboard, markers, eraser, projection screen, overhead projector, and tape recorder

Transparencies:

A. SIER
B. Listening Error 1
C. Listening Error 2
D. Listening Error 3
E. Listening Error 4
F. Listening Error 5
G. Nature

Handouts:

1. Four Listening Types
2. Quiz One
3. Quiz Two
4. Profile Analysis
5. Ten Behaviors Which Indicate Listening
6. Listening Comprehension Activity - Giver
7. Listening Comprehension Activity - Follower
8. Characteristics of Effective Listening 1
9. Characteristics of Effective Listening 2

I. INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS LISTENING

A. What Is Listening

Do people tell you at times that you misunderstand them? The art of listening has become very important with the fast-paced impact of work, family, and recreation. Communication is often inadequate to convey the appropriate meaning or what is said is simply not heard. The U.S. Labor Department found that each individual spends an average of 55% of communication time listening. If additional effort is spent toward constructive listening, understanding will improve dramatically with our fellow employees and others that we communicate with.

In order to improve our listening skills, we must first gain an understanding of what listening is. Listening is more than just simply hearing. There are four main components to listening (Steil, Summerfield & de Mare, 1983, pp. 11-12), they are:

- **Sensing:** The ability to hear what is communicated.
- **Interpreting:** To understand what is being communicated.
- **Evaluating:** To consider the relevance of what is being communicated.
- **Responding:** To complete the cycle of communication by indicating in an appropriate way that we have sensed.

Show Transparency "SIER" and discuss the four steps.

These four parts of the listening process model, or SIER for sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding, can be used in many ways to help us improve our listening abilities. It can be used to identify past problems and to identify where the communication failure occurred so that a remedy can be found. The SIER model will also help us to consciously think through the listening process, step by step, to build upon our listening abilities.

Ask students for examples of using the SEIR model to assist them with diagnosing communication problems and to identify where the communication failure occurred so that a remedy can be found. The SIER model will also help us to consciously think through the listening process, step by step, to build upon our listening abilities.

Respond with examples.

B. Listening Types

All listeners and speaking/listening exchanges are not created equal. There are four basic listening types. They can be recognized by the following characteristics (Pierce, 1993, p. 80):

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTION	INSTRUCTOR ACTIVITY	STUDENT ACTIVITY
▸ **Active listener:** Pays full attention when others are talking. They focus on what is said and the style in which it is said. A lot of energy is spent in the speaker/listener exchange. Noticeable traits include: - Alert posture or stance - Large amount of direct eye contact ▸ **Involved listener:** Focus most of there attention upon what is being said and the style of its delivery. The listener is involved to some extent with the speaker/listener exchange and reflects upon the transmitted message. Noticeable traits include: - Intermittent alert posture or stance - Some direct eye contact ▸ **Passive listener:** Receives information as if being talked to (such as when viewing television) and is not an equal in the speaker/listener exchange. Responsibility for the successful information exchange is assumed by this type of listener to be that of the speaker. The listener spends little energy during the exchange. Noticeable traits include: - Usually attentive - May fake attention occasionally - Relaxed posture or stance ▸ **Detached listener:** Withdraws from the speaker/listener exchange entirely. The listener becomes the object of the speaker's message, not its receiver. - Noticeable lack of enthusiasm - Avoidance of direct eye contact - Overly relaxed posture (or slumped) - Inattentive and disinterested - Easily distracted	Distribute handout "Four Listening Types" Ask students what listening types they see in their fellow classmates.	Respond to question.

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTION	INSTRUCTOR ACTIVITY	STUDENT ACTIVITY
II. LISTENING ERRORS		
There are different reasons why effective listening does not take place as often as it should. One of the reasons listening errors are made in education and industry today is that hearing and listening are often confused with one another. Although something may be heard, "hearing" may not involve listening. When something is heard, the eardrums are vibrated by sound waves; physiologically, a noise has been acknowledged. To have listened, the information heard must be mentally processed (Sund & Corin, 1978, p. 125,).	Have students form a line or circle. Have the first student whisper a story to the second student while recording it with a tape recorder. The second student then whispers the story to the next student, and so on, until the last student has been told. The story whispered to the last student is also recorded. Compare the original story told by the first student to the one told to the last student.	Whisper story to the next student.
One listening error is made when assuming that listening is a natural process. Listening is not a natural process. As defined, hearing is a natural process, but listening is a learned ability. It takes practice, determination, and self-control to be a good listener.		
A. Failure to Actively Listen		
Just as it is not a natural process, there is a false assumption that listening is passive. Listening is a skill which requires active participation from the listener (Adler, 1992, p. 96,). Elaine M. Fitzpatrick (1982) wrote "listening is an active, meaning-seeking process. You listen so you can understand and learn". The failure to actively listen, and therefore the failure to accurately listen, can materialize in several forms.		
B. Common Errors of Passive Listening	Show transparencies B-7: "Listening Errors" Discuss each common listening error with class.	Discuss importance of each common listening error displayed on overhead.
Some errors commonly made in listening have to do with the failure to actively listen. Some of these errors resulting from passive listening are listed below (Matzeck, 1991).		
▸ Not facing the speaker [maintains less attention] ▸ No eye contact ▸ Not using positive, nonverbal signals ▸ Interrupting before the speaker is finished ▸ Being judgmental about statements made		
C. Rapid Thought		
Active listening is necessary for effective listening, but does not guarantee productive listening. Even when actively trying to listen, factors are present which make it even more important for the listener to concentrate on what is being said to comprehend all that is said. Because we can think at a rate of about 400 words per minute, and people	Ask how many of the students have found their thoughts drifting off at times when someone is speaking.	Respond to question.

usually talk at about 100-200 words per minute, the listener's attention often wanders away from what someone is saying to them (Fitzpatrick, 1982, p. 5). Because of this disparity, the failure to actively listen almost dooms effective comprehension of the speaker.

D. Egocentrism

Another problem with listening skills in American society relates to how others are viewed by the listener. Robert Sund and Arthur Corin (1978) wrote that "good listening conveys to others that we respect and admire their uniqueness, individuality, and being". In America industry, it often seems that respect for other individuals is a thing of the past. There seems to be a belief, usually mistaken, that the listener's own ideas are more important or valuable than those of others (Adler, 1992, p. 95). Gary Irwin (1994) wrote "Because of the almost contemptible attitude prevalent, listening to others has almost become a lost art. This is unfortunate. If we fail to listen, not just hear, but listen with eagerness, we will fail to learn not to make the mistakes of the past. We will fail to discover the dreams for the future. Our very fabric as a nation may cease to be. We must remember that even the ones called 'morons' by society have something to teach us. We must again learn to listen".

Ask students "Do you find yourself listening more closely to some people than others or not listening at all to some people regardless of the merit of what they are saying because of biases or pre-conceived ideas in your life? Why? Is there a reason for this phenomenon?"

Respond to question.

E. Perceived Role of Listener to Speaker

Another error relates to how the listener perceives themselves and their role in relation to others. In the educational system ,for example, if we perceived our major role as an educator/facilitator as assisting in the process of human development rather than simply teaching subject matter, then we may tend to focus on the student first and content second. We would then have to listen more intently to what the student had to say and, only after they had finished, would proceed to help the student make further discoveries by using their thought processes to respond to our questions and responses to their statements (Sund & Corin, 1978, p. 126). Instead, educators tend to dwell mainly with subject matter and not on the relevancy of the subject matter to the student, or the student's ideas about what has been discussed. In other words, educators are sometimes bad listeners.

Ask students for their opinions of educators in conjunction with the perceived role of listener to speaker.

Write the answers on the white board.

Respond to question.

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTION	INSTRUCTOR ACTIVITY	STUDENT ACTIVITY
F. Formulating Responses Our society also tolerates another listening error. One reason many don't listen well in America is that in this fast-paced society, the listener is always formulating a reaction to what the speaker says before the speaker is finished (Sund & Corin, 1978, p. 125,). This causes the listener to miss much of what has been said. When this happens, the meaning of what the speaker has said can easily be very different from the meaning of what the listener "heard".	Remind students of first activity and prompt discussion.	Discussion of first activity.
G. Message Overload Distractions also keep the listener from listening effectively. One distraction is called message overload. This occurs when the listener is still trying to digest information given by another speaker, or the speaker is giving a deluge of information, which may all be equally important, it is difficult to listen effectively.	Discuss with students possible remedies for this type of situation (note taking).	Discuss remedies.
H. Preoccupation Another listening error is closely related to message overload. In fact, message overload can precipitate the listening error of preoccupation. A listener can be preoccupied with business concerns, personal problems, scheduling conflicts, and a myriad of other concerns which may make it almost impossible to actually "listen" to a speaker.	Ask the students for examples of when they have been so preoccupied with something else that they have failed to effectively hear a speaker.	Respond to question.
I. Physical Distractions Physical distractions also hinder effective listening. If there is too much noise in a room, caused by heating systems, machinery or other noise producers, the atmosphere is not going to be conducive to effective listening. The temperature of the room, a nearby conversation, and other distractions will also make true listening harder(Adler, 1992, p. 95).		
J. Hearing Problems One hearing error that is often overlooked is that of hearing deficiencies (Adler, 1992, p. 95). Many people have a hearing loss, and therefore miss a lot of what any given speaker may say. Others may not realize that a problem exists. Either way, hearing deficiencies cause errors in listening.		

K. General Causes of Poor Listening

Although there are various errors made in listening, C. Glenn Pierce (March, 1989) wrote that the three main causes for these errors are daydreaming, distractions in the immediate environment, and over dwelling on something just stated . The errors, and reasons for poor listening can include failure to actively listen, rapid thought processes as opposed to slower speaking speeds, egocentrism, the listener's perceived relationship with the speaker, thinking about responses to the content of the speech, message overload, preoccupation with other concerns, physical distractions, and hearing problems (Adler, 1992, p.95). Whatever the reasons, it seems that there may be much room to improve an individual's listening skills.

To be able to improve listening skills, an assessment of present listening skills must first be made. The following section will deal with the assessment of listening skills.

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTION	INSTRUCTOR ACTIVITY	STUDENT ACTIVITY
III. PERSONAL LISTENING PROFILE		
A. Rating Yourself		
In today's workplace what is more important, computer skills or listening skills? If you think it is computer skills, then think again! It doesn't do an employer any good to have an employee that can operate equipment, but not follow directions.		
For someone to make any improvement in their listening skills they first must assess their listening skills. You will take two quizzes to build a profile about your listening skills.		
In the first quiz you will describe how you rate yourself as a listener. In the second quiz you will rate how you think others rate you as a listener.	Distribute handout: "Quiz One" Distribute handout: "Quiz Two"	Complete "Quiz One" Complete "Quiz Two"
There are no correct or incorrect answers. Your responses, however, will extend your understanding of yourself as a listener. Also highlight areas in which improvement might be welcome to you and to those around you.		
When you have completed both quizzes, please turn to the profile analysis to see how your scores compare with those who have taken the same tests.	Distribute handout: "Profile Analysis"	Review handout and compare with own's "Quiz One" and "Quiz Two" responses
You may be surprised to learn how other people have responded to the same questions and it may help you arrive at an understanding about yourself as a listener.	Ask each student to discuss their findings from taking the quizzes.	Respond to question.

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTION	INSTRUCTOR ACTIVITY	STUDENT ACTIVITY

IV. Improving Listening Skills

A. Make Time

For listening to be effective, individuals must make time to stop and listen to one another. If time is not taken, the message may be worthless. To take this time often requires eliminating other distractions such as visitors, phone calls, etc. Don't doodle, tap, or shuffle papers when someone is speaking. With a one on one meeting, it may even be proper to shut the door.

B. Offer Full Attention

Showing interest is not characterized by looking bored or with idol fidgeting. In order to show attentiveness, it may be necessary to set another time for the meeting. Other means of showing interest are taking notes and occasional interjections. Writing things down enable recall of important points. Be careful and selective in taking notes to avoid the loss of the message. Interjections such as "yes," and "I see" indicate concentration. Avoid thinking about other things such as the weather or where to eat dinner. This only draws you away from the speaker and what is meaningful in the message. Leaning a little toward the speaker will increase your attention span.

Distribute handout "Ten Behaviors Which Indicate Listening".

Read and discuss handout.

C. Listen Between the Lines

Closer listening is performed through attention to feelings. The feelings portrayed by the speaker can indicate strong will, distress and other underlying emotions which can be heard by the listener. It is also important to listen for ideas. The listener should get the whole picture not just bits and pieces. Listen for overtones by the speaker. Things can be learned from a person's reactions to the subject, audience, etc. Follow the speaker as he or she moves to get a better picture of feelings, ideas, and overtones.

D. Ask Questions

Questions are an indication of attentiveness. However, questions posed with sincerity enlarge the understanding of the listener and perhaps the speaker as

well. Questions should be prepared in advance to provide a more open mind and listening time.

E. Keep An Open Mind

Because we listen and comprehend faster than a speaker can talk, there will be idle time at points during a message which may allow an opening for mind-wandering distractions. Use these idle moments to summarize the main ideas of the message. Turn off personal problems and concentrate on the speaker's message. Further, the message can be better retained if consideration is given to the seriousness of the speaker's problems and point of view.

Conduct activity "Listening Comprehension".

Give each pair of students two envelopes labeled as:
- Partner A, Envelope #1
- Partner B, Envelope #2

Instruct students to follower directions within the envelopes.

Perform activity.

F. Let the Speaker Finish

You can't talk and listen at the same time. Let the speaker conclude before making remarks. This is especially true if the speaker is a personal acquaintance. Many times we don't already know what the person is going to say when we think we do. This could be called jumping to conclusions. Avoid interruptions when the speaker pauses. They may not be finished with their thoughts.

G. Be Respectful

We often judge people by their credentials and from this judgement we determine what considerations to give them. Don't write-off the speaker's remarks due to preconceived notions. Don't become irritated by the speaker's opinions or mannerisms. This only opens doors for your own "mental arguing" which causes a loss of attention to the speaker's message. Being respectful can be thought synonymously with trust. Private conversations should be kept private and confidential.

Distribute handout "Characteristics of Effective Listening".

Read and discuss handout.

H. Practice

Practice is required to enhance any skill. Have others evaluate your listening with truth and honesty so that you can improve. Other means of practicing can be accomplished through recordings on audio or video. This can provide you clear insight into your listening problems and assist you to make improvements.

Show transparency "Nature".

V. CONCLUSION

We have shown that to improve our listening skills, we must first gain a better understanding of what listening is. We have discussed the four main components of listening:
- sensing,
- interpreting,
- evaluating, and
- responding.

We have also discussed the types of listeners:
- active,
- involved,
- passive, and
- detached listeners.

We have also looked at the errors most common in listening, most of which are caused by:
- daydreaming,
- distractions in the immediate environment, and
- over dwelling on something just stated.

We have seen that the errors, and reasons for poor listening can include
- failure to actively listen,
- rapid thought processes as opposed to slower speaking speeds,
- egocentrism,
- the listener's perceived relationship with the speaker,
- thinking about responses to the content of the speech,
- message overload,
- concerns,
- physical distractions, and
- hearing problems.

We then discovered that we need to rate ourselves as listeners to determine where improvement needs to be made. After assessing our problems, we then discovered ways to improve listening skills, which included:
- making time to listen,
- offering full attention to the speaker,
- listening between the lines,
- asking questions about what is said,
- keeping an open mind,
- letting the speaker finish,
- being respectful of the speaker, and
- practicing to become a good listener.

It should be obvious that listening is not a natural process, but a sometimes complicated, learned skill. The seasoned and well-trained listener is actively involved in what is being said to them, and will be in as much demand as a good speaker. Practice being a good listener at home and with friends. Both you and they will benefit.

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTION	INSTRUCTOR ACTIVITY	STUDENT ACTIVITY

Handout

Ten Behaviors Which Indicate Listening

1. Reflecting	Let me see if I've got your point...
2. Supporting	Yes, good idea.
3. Disagreeing	Won't that cost too much?
4. Constructing	Would it help if we...?
5. Criticizing	If we do this for him, we'll have to do it for everybody else...
6. Clarifying	Isn't the point that....
7. Interpreting	Are you really suggesting....?
8. Confirming	So, we agree that....
9. Testing	Would it be right to say that...
10.Non-verbal signs	Nodding, grunting, eyes open, shaking head, etc.

Handout

Listening Comprehension Activity

Giver Directions

Partner A. Envelope #1. You are to study the diagram below. With your back to your partner, tell him or her how to draw the diagram. No questions or repetitions are allowed.

Handout

Listening Comprehension Activity

Follower Directions

Partner B. Envelope #2. With your back to your partner, you are to draw a diagram exactly as he or she tells you in the space below. You may not ask questions or ask him to repeat information.

Handout

Characteristics of Effective Listening

Ineffective	Effective
Non-Verbal Behavior	
Listener looks bored, uninterested or judgmental; avoids eye contact; displays distracting mannerisms (doodles, etc.)	Listener maintains positive posture; avoids distracting mannerisms; keeps attention focused on speaker; maintains eye contact; nods and smiles when appropriate
Focus of Attention	
Listener shifts focus of attention to himself; "When something like that happened to me, I..."	Listener keeps focus of her comments on the speaker; "When that happened, what did you do?" How did you feel?"
Acceptance	
Listener fails to accept speaker's ideas and feelings; "I think it would have been better to...."	Listener accepts ideas and feelings; "That's an interesting idea, can you say more?"
Empathy	
Listener fails to empathize; "I don't see why you felt that..."	Listener empathizes; "So when that happened, you felt angry."

Handout

Characteristics of Effective Listening

Ineffective	Effective
Probing	
Listener fails to probe into an area, to follow up an idea or feeling	Listener probes in a helpful way (but does not cross examine)
Paraphrasing	
Listener fails to check the accuracy of communication by restating in his own words important statements made by the speaker	Listener paraphrases at the appropriate time
Summarizing	
Listener fails to summarize	Listener summarizes the progress of the conversation from time to time
Advise	
Listener narrows the range of alternatives by suggesting a "correct course of action	Listener broadens the range of ideas by suggesting (or asking the speaker for) a number of alternatives

Transparency

Nature

Nature gave man two ears but only one tongue, which is a gentle hint that he should listen more than he talks.

Handout

Quiz One

A. Circle the term that best describes you as a listener.

Superior

Excellent

Above Average

Average

Below Average

Poor

Terrible

B. On a scale of 0-100 (100 = highest), how would you rate yourself as a listener?

_____
(0-100)

Handout

Quiz Two

How do you think the following people would rate you as a listener?

Your best friend _____ (0-100)

Your boss _____ (0-100)

Colleague _____ (0-100)

Job subordinate _____ (0-100)

Your spouse _____ (0-100)

Handout

Profile Analysis

This is how other people have responded to the same questions that you have just answered.

Quiz One

A. 85% of all listeners questioned rated themselves as "Average" or less. Fewer than 5% rated themselves as "Superior" or "Excellent".

B. On the 0-100 scale, the extreme range is 10-90; the general range is 35-85; and the average rating is 55.

Quiz Two

When comparing the listening self-ratings and projected ratings of others, most respondents believe that their best friend would rate them highest as a listener. And that rating would be higher than the one they gave themselves in Quiz One where the average was 55.

How come? We can only guess that best friend status is such an intimate, special kind of relationship that you can't imagine it ever happening unless you were a good listener. If you weren't, you and he or she wouldn't be best friends to begin with.

Going down the list, people who take this quiz usually think their bosses would rate them higher than they rated themselves. Part of that is probably wishful thinking and part of it is true. We do tend to listen to our bosses better, whether it's out of respect or fear doesn't matter.

The grades for colleague and job subordinate work out to be just about the same as the listener rated himself - 55.

When you get to spouse something really dramatic happens. The score is significantly lower than the 55 average that the previous profile takers gave themselves. It is interesting that the figure goes steadily downhill. While newlyweds tend to rate their spouse at the same high level as their best friend, as the marriage goes on the rating fails. So in a household where the couple has been married 50 years, there could be a lot of talk, but maybe nobody is really listening.

Transparency

SIER

- **Sensing**: The ability to hear what is communicated.

- **Interpreting**: To understand what is being communicated.

- **Evaluating**: To consider the relevance of what is being communicated.

- **Responding**: To complete the cycle of communication by indicating in an appropriate way that we have sensed.

Handout

Four Listening Types

▸ **Active listener:** Pays full attention when others are talking. He or she focuses on what is said and the style in which it is said. A lot of energy is spent in the speaker/listener exchange. Noticeable traits include:

- Alert posture or stance.
- Large amount of direct eye contact.

▸ **Involved listener:** Focuses most of his or her attention upon what is being said and the style of its delivery. The listener is involved to some extent with the speaker/listener exchange and reflects upon the transmitted message. Noticeable traits include:

- Intermittent alert posture or stance.
- Some direct eye contact.

▸ **Passive listener:** Receives information as if being talked (such as when viewing television) and is not an equal in the speaker/listener exchange. Responsibility for the successful information exchange is assumed by this type of listener to be that of the speaker. The listener spends little energy during the exchange. Noticeable traits include:

- Usually attentive.
- May fake attention occasionally.
- Relaxed posture or stance.

▸ **Detached listener:** Withdraws from the speaker/listener exchange entirely. The listener becomes the object of the speaker's message, not its receiver.

- Noticeable lack of enthusiasm.
- Avoidance of direct eye contact.
- Overly relaxed posture (or slumped).
- Inattentive and disinterested.
- Easily distracted.